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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGION

Two works of very diverse nature have recently appeared in the field of the psychology of religion, representing two sharply contrasted points of view—one of them by a theologian,¹ one by a psychologist.² Perhaps it is a mistake to speak of them as being in the same field, although they are meant to be; for Dr. Snowden's work contains little psychology beyond what one finds in the title. It is, in fact, not directed to the psychologist, but to the preacher and the religious worker, and it contains much sound advice and much useful material for this class of readers.

A very different sort of work is Professor Leuba's *The Belief in God and Immortality*. This book will be of very great interest to the technical student of the psychology of religion, and is one that will probably bring but scant comfort to the preacher and the religious teacher. Yet it is a book which every clergyman and practical religious worker, as well as everyone interested in the psychology of religion and in the future of religion, should read and ponder. For Professor Leuba has made a contribution to our knowledge of religious belief that is of very considerable significance.

The book falls into two quite distinct sections, Part I being chiefly anthropological and dealing with the origins and history of the belief in a continued existence after death, while Parts II and III present the results of a statistical inquiry into the present status of religious belief and some considerations as to its utility. It is in Part III that the author's own point of view explicitly appears, but the reader should bear it in mind throughout the entire book. Professor Leuba presents belief in a personal God and personal immortality with insight and some sympathy, but he himself is thoroughly persuaded that both beliefs not only are false, but have today become actually harmful. In spite of this personal attitude, however, it must be said that he has, with occasional exceptions, succeeded in viewing and presenting his subject objectively and without unfair prejudice.

When one opens a treatise on the origin and history of the belief in immortality, one expects (thanks to much boring experience) to be presented with the same old facts and theories that anthropologists

¹ *The Psychology of Religion*. By James H. Snowden. New York: Revell, 1916. 390 pages. \$1.50.

² *The Belief in God and Immortality*. By James H. Leuba. Boston: Sherman, French & Co., 1916. xvii+340 pages. \$2.00.

have been giving us for so many years and with so little real variation. It is, therefore, a pleasure to find, as one does in Leuba's work, a really fresh presentation and something like an original point of view. The thesis which is defended in Part I of Professor Leuba's book is that there have been historically two quite distinct types of belief in a future life, differing from each other both in origin and in nature, and indeed so unlike that "it would be nearer the truth to maintain that, save for the idea of continuation, the two beliefs have nothing in common. Nothing else belonging to the old conception remains in the new, and none of the services rendered by the new were known to the believers in the old." The first of these two forms of belief, found among savage tribes of ancient and of modern times, owed its origin to the various psychological factors—dreams and the rest—commonly pointed out by anthropologists. And the savage who held it applied it, not to himself, but to the dead. So far as the savage himself was concerned his thought was centered on this life; nor did he as a rule consider the next world as one of delight, and never as one of reward and punishment. Thus the "primary belief" was a theory about the dead and their ghosts, *not* a hope for one's own future. The second or modern form of belief in immortality had a much later and a quite independent origin. It presupposes a considerable mental development and owes its rise to a "conviction of the insufficiency of this life to satisfy fully the instincts of preservation and completion as enlarged by moral perception," and also to the faith in a benevolent and just Creator. The holder of this belief was not interested in ghosts, but centered his attention on the hope of his own future destiny. Nor was this modern belief merely a continuation and transformation of the earlier form. History shows us, in the author's opinion, the earlier belief actually coming to an end and actively combated by the ethical and religious leaders of the peoples at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era. Instead of being mutually helpful, the two beliefs were positively antagonistic; and the acceptance of the later form was almost conditioned upon the decay of the earlier. Professor Leuba discusses most interestingly the transition from one form of belief to the other among the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Egyptians. In spite of his clever presentation, it must be said that his theory fits the facts of Egyptian religious history but ill, and that if he had included in his survey the religions of India and Persia his powers of interpretation would have been taxed to their utmost. Our earliest sources for the Indian belief already point to a longing on the

part of the individual for the joys of Yama's realm; and in Egypt the relatively moral form of the belief connected with Osiris plainly antedated the less moral conception found in the religion of Amon Ra. On the other hand, it must be admitted that Leuba's hypothesis lights up several phases of the religions of Israel, Greece, and Rome which hitherto had been somewhat dark.

Interesting and valuable as is the first part of Professor Leuba's book, it is the second part that will make it memorable. For we have here a rather startling revelation of the present status of the belief in God and in immortality among American college students and American scientists and scholars. I have called it a "revelation," for the author is not here giving us his guess, but recording certain facts which he gleaned by means of one of the most careful and truly scientific questionnaire investigations ever conducted. The dangers of the questionnaire method of obtaining information are obvious—its tendency to *select* only a certain type of respondent, the difficulty in interpreting the answers received, etc. Professor Leuba succeeded in obviating these difficulties to a very considerable extent by making his questions exceedingly simple and by asking for little beyond "Yes" and "No" answers, and (in most cases) by sending his questionnaire to a fairly large proportion of a very limited type of respondent. These respondents were: "all the students of a number of classes belonging to non-technical departments of nine colleges of high rank and two classes of a normal school"; 90 per cent of all the students of a certain woman's college; two groups of 500 scientists each, whose names were taken at random from *American Men of Science*; 375 historians, taken by a rule of chance from the membership list of the American Historical Association; 345 sociologists, taken in similar fashion from the list of the American Sociological Association; and all the members of the American Psychological Association after eliminating non-teachers and "those who are decidedly educators and philosophers rather than psychologists." Within each list of scholars, moreover, he made a distinction between the more and the less eminent. The results, as has been indicated, are of very considerable interest and are, briefly, the following: Concerning the first group (from the nine colleges) he writes: "As many as 31 per cent of the men, and only 11 per cent of the women conceive God as impersonal. If the doubtful cases are added, the percentages rise to 40.5 per cent for the men and to 15.7 per cent for the women. . . . Considered all together my data would indicate that from 40 to 50 per cent of the young men leaving college entertain an idea of God

incompatible with the acceptance of the Christian religion, even as interpreted by the liberal clergy."

As to the second group above referred to (the woman's college), Professor Leuba tells us: "The most striking result of this inquiry is the high percentage of believers in the lower classes and the relatively high percentage of disbelievers in the higher classes. Only 15 per cent of the Freshmen reject immortality, and 4 per cent are uncertain; while nearly 32 per cent of the Juniors have given it up, and 8 per cent more are uncertain." Of the scientists, 41.8 per cent believed in God, and a somewhat higher proportion accepted immortality. Of the historians, 48.3 per cent testified to their belief in God, and 51.5 per cent to belief in immortality. The percentages for the sociologists on these two questions were 46.3 and 55.3 per cent. With the psychologists, belief in both these conceptions suffered a notable drop—standing at 24.2 and 19.8 per cent, respectively. One of the most notable results of the investigation was the fact that in every case the percentage of believers among the more eminent men was considerably lower than among the less eminent, the low-water mark being touched in the belief in immortality among the "greater" psychologists, which stood at only 8.8 per cent. Professor Leuba sums up the results of his inquiry as follows:

The situation revealed by the present statistical studies demands a revision of public opinion regarding the prevalence and the future of the two cardinal beliefs of official Christianity; and shows the futility of the efforts of those who would meet the present religious crisis by devising a more efficient organization and co-operation of the churches, or more attractive social features, or even a more complete consecration of the church membership to its task. The essential problem facing organized Christianity is constituted by the widespread rejection of its two fundamental dogmas—a rejection apparently destined to extend parallel with the diffusion of knowledge and the moral qualities that make for eminence in scholarly pursuits.

Professor Leuba's own view seems to be that the two beliefs in question are destined to be nearly or quite abandoned by all thinking people. Those who hold a view different from his as to the utility and the essential truth of these beliefs will here of course be unable to agree with him. The chief consideration leading so many scholars—particularly biologists, sociologists, and psychologists—to give up the beliefs in question is, as Professor Leuba himself indicates, the inconsistency of these beliefs with the extension of the causal law to the realm of the spirit. Certainly the movement for such extension is being carried on

rapidly and radically in our times; but there are at least some signs of an antagonistic movement, even in the class of most eminent scientists and thinkers. It may be that the tendency toward mechanizing the universe has reached its acme. If so, it is certainly possible that religious faith—and particularly the belief in immortality—may enter into a period of growth, transformation, and rejuvenation comparable to that which, on Leuba's theory, the human race was witnessing two thousand years ago. Yet this is but a hope, and one can only say in conclusion that Professor Leuba has put in his debt all those who have the welfare of religion at heart by showing them that the situation is really much more serious than most of them had supposed.

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LECTURES ON PREACHING

The title of Bishop McDowell's lectures clearly declares their purpose,¹ and the lectures with growing clearness and force accomplish the end. There is no effort to reinterpret religious truth, but to connect Christian experience with its source and make it more vital and effective. But the method of approach is modern. The author understands that the order of faith for most men is through personal knowledge of Jesus, and that the condition of power for all men is in the true imitation of Jesus; not a servile repetition of creed or copying of manner, but the entering into his fellowship with God and growing in his love for men. Familiar doctrines of the church, such as incarnation and reconciliation, get a new and dynamic meaning through such natural and human interpretation.

The lecturer here is always the preacher. Every lecture is a sermon. To the young men before him he pours out his own experience of the grace of Christ, his own passion to bring men into the obedience of sons. It is the spirit of the lectures that is cleansing and impelling. The method naturally leads to repetition and the danger of appeal. But Bishop McDowell's noble spiritual manhood saves him from the least touch of unreality.

The lectures have large-mindedness as to practical problems of religion and wisdom in dealing with men. Every page has suggestions for the preacher. A brief quotation must be enough. There is no wiser

¹ *Good Ministers of Jesus Christ*. (Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching, Yale University, 1917.) By William Fraser McDowell. New York: Abingdon Press, 1917. 307 pages. \$1.25.